

National Hand washing Awareness Week: December 3-9

Written by Utah Department of Health

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Think about all of the things that you touched today - from the telephone to the toilet. Maybe you blew your nose and played with your dog. Whatever you did, you came into contact with germs. It's easy for germs on your hand to end up in your mouth and cause illness. Hand washing is a simple habit and when done properly, is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick.

Despite the proven health benefits of hand washing, many people don't practice this habit as often as they should - even after using the restroom. Throughout the day you accumulate germs on your hands from a variety of sources. If you don't wash your hands frequently enough, you can infect yourself with these germs by touching your eyes, nose or mouth. And you can spread these germs to others by touching them or by touching surfaces that they also touch, such as doorknobs.

Follow these instructions for washing with soap and water:

- Wet your hands with warm, running water and apply liquid soap or use clean bar soap. Lather well.
- Rub your hands vigorously together for at least 15 to 20 seconds.
- Scrub all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails.
- Rinse well.
- Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel.
- Use a towel to turn off the faucet.

Antibacterial soaps have become increasingly popular in recent years. However, these soaps are no more effective at killing germs than is regular soap. In general, regular soap is fine. The combination of scrubbing your hands with soap, antibacterial or not, and rinsing them with water loosens and removes bacteria from your hands.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are an excellent alternative to hand washing, especially when soap and water aren't available. They're actually more effective than soap and water in killing bacteria and viruses that cause disease. Not all hand sanitizers are effective, though. Some

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"waterless" hand sanitizers don't contain alcohol. Use only the alcohol-based products.

Hand washing doesn't take much time or effort, but it offers great rewards in terms of preventing illness. Adopting this simple habit can play a major role in protecting your health. So take a few extra seconds and lather up!